

# Graduate and Professional Student Handbook

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## Part I: Academic Policies

Saint Mary's College of California

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# Part I: Academic Policies

## Definitions Applying to Academic Policies

**Graduate student:** A student admitted to any graduate-level program at Saint Mary's College.

**Professional student:** A student admitted to any undergraduate program designed for working adults. For purposes of clarity, these students are also referred to in the handbook as "undergraduate professional student."

**Business day:** Refers to all days during which the College is officially open, including days when classes are not in session.

**Program director:** The administrator responsible for a particular program.

**Dean:** The administrator responsible for a particular school. In nearly all cases, the dean may delegate responsibilities assigned to her/him to another party, such as an associate dean.

## Admissions Requirements

Saint Mary's College welcomes applications from students qualified to pursue a program of study leading to a graduate or undergraduate professional degree. The admissions process is designed to evaluate the potential for success in an individual program. Applicants should consult the department to which they are applying for its specific evaluation requirements and criteria.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Applicants must hold or expect to hold prior to the beginning of classes a bachelor's degree (for master's degree programs) or a master's degree (for doctoral programs) for a regionally accredited U.S. institution or an equivalent international university. International students must provide transcripts showing graduation from a recognized college or university with a degree normally requiring 15-16 years of prior education before graduation from college or university.

Applicants must submit two letters of recommendation from academic or professional referees and official transcripts of all baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate studies.

In evaluating a candidate for admission, the admissions officer or committee reviews the following credentials: the completed application, transcripts from the colleges and/or universities the applicant has attended, and letters of recommendation. Some schools and programs in the College require standardized examinations, such as the GRE or GMAT, and some schools or programs may conduct admissions interviews or require writing samples or statements of purpose. In reviewing transcripts, admissions officers will take into account the choice of coursework, the rigor of the undergraduate major, the competitiveness of the academic institutions, and the grade point average (GPA). For master's degree and credential programs, an undergraduate GPA of 2.8 or better is generally the standard for admissions consideration. Doctoral programs typically require an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 and a graduate GPA of 3.5.

### GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Applicants to the LEAP program must hold a high school diploma or its equivalent. Applicants to the Leadership and Organizational Studies program must have earned a minimum of 64 semester units of acceptable transfer credit.

Applicants must submit two letters of recommendation from academic or professional referees and official transcripts of all baccalaureate studies.

In evaluating a candidate for admission, the admissions officer or committee reviews the following credentials: the completed application, transcripts from the colleges and/or universities the applicant has attended, letters of recommendation, an experiential learning inventory, and an essay or statements of goals. In reviewing transcripts, admissions officers will take into account the grade point average (GPA). An undergraduate GPA of 2.0 or better is generally the standard for consideration.

## Academic Standing

### UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Students who meet all program admissions criteria, have complete files, and have been selected for admission by program-specific admissions processes are accepted unconditionally.

### PROVISIONAL ACCEPTANCE

Students whose admissions files are incomplete (e.g., missing test scores, transcripts, etc.) may be provisionally admitted, and must take steps to ensure that their files are completed within one term. The time limit may be extended with the approval of the program director.

### CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

If a student has a complete application but missing requirements, such as the Basic Skills Requirement (BSR) or the Writing Proficiency Exam, this student may be admitted conditionally. The program director will notify the student in writing how to attain unconditional acceptance and provide a deadline for achieving it.

### ACADEMIC PROBATION

Graduate students whose cumulative grade point average falls below a 3.0 (B) average at any time during their course of study are placed on academic probation. They are notified of their status in writing by the program director. Upon notification, students have one academic term to bring their grade point average up to the 3.0 level. Failure to do so may result in academic disqualification.

Some programs at the College — especially those using P/F grading — may issue Marginal Performance Letters. The use of Marginal Performance Letters is a warning to the student that even though his/her coursework might merit a passing grade, the work was nonetheless marginal. An instructor may note

such deficiency by submitting a Marginal Performance Letter to the program director along with the passing grade. A Marginal Performance Letter is not a grade and does not appear on the student's transcript; it is a formal letter placed in the student's official file. This letter cannot be removed prior to degree completion except at the request of the instructor. All Marginal Performance Letters are removed from the file after the degree is completed.

Marginal Performance Letters are intended to: 1) inform the student of identifiable weaknesses in performance so that the student can become aware of them and seek to improve his/her performance; 2) inform the program administration of specific concerns with respect to a student performance so that students can be appropriately counseled; and 3) serve as the basis for probation and disqualification. Students who accumulate two or more Marginal Performance Letters may be placed on Academic Probation.

Undergraduate Professional students whose grade point average falls below a 2.0 (C) average at any time during their course of study are placed on academic probation. They are notified of their status in writing by their program director. Students have one semester to bring their grade point average up to the 2.0 level. Failure to do so may result in academic disqualification.

### **ACADEMIC DISQUALIFICATION**

Graduate students are disqualified from continuing in a program when they have not attained a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher for two continuous terms of enrollment. Two terms of enrollment count as continuous even if a student has taken a leave between terms. Students in P/F programs are subject to disqualification if they receive a failing grade in two courses or if they fail or receive Marginal Performance Letters in three courses.

Undergraduate Professional students are disqualified from continuing in a program when they have not attained a 2.0 grade point average for two or more terms. The dean of the school notifies students subject to disqualification by registered letter. Any student subject to disqualification is barred from further study at Saint Mary's College.

### **SPECIAL ACADEMIC PROBATION**

Special Academic Probation is granted at the discretion of the dean of the school and may be based on the student's extreme personal hardship, serious illness, or a similar reason that justifies poor academic standing. Students facing academic disqualification may request to be placed on Special Academic Probation by filing a Petition for Special Action within two weeks of the notice of disqualification. In addition to explaining their special circumstances, students must also outline how they expect to improve their grades and resume regular academic standing by the end of the next term. If granting Special Academic Probation, the dean may further specify additional conditions and program requirements for removing academic probation status. Students who fail to meet the conditions of Special Academic Probation are disqualified from further study.

## **Full- and Part-time Status**

Students should consult with their individual programs in order to determine a course of study that is considered full- or part- time.

Full-time status may be a requirement of a program and may determine eligibility for financial aid.

## **Residency Requirement**

"In residence" typically means on the Saint Mary's College campus, but there common exceptions: Students attending SMC — sponsored overseas programs and students attending at satellite campuses are in residence, as are students enrolled in online or hybrid courses. At least 50 percent of all credential or master's programs must be completed in residence. The remaining 50 percent may consist of transfer credits, challenges, comprehensive evaluations, independent study, and other non-standard classes.

## **Transfer Units for Graduate Students**

A limited amount of graduate credit obtained at other accredited colleges or universities may be accepted in partial fulfillment of some requirements for a credential, certificate, or master's degree. Generally, no more than two full-unit courses can be so approved, but under special circumstances, the dean of the school may approve up to a total of three full-unit courses. Transferred credit does not qualify as work done in residence.

Courses acceptable for transfer credit must:

- Have been graduate courses with clear relevance to course of study,
- Have been taken at a regionally accredited institution of higher education within the last five years, (Coursework may be acceptable beyond five years if the candidate can demonstrate current experience and knowledge.)
- Have been assigned a grade of "B" (or its equivalent or better),
- Not have been supervised fieldwork, field practice, practicum or independent study (with the exception of one semester of credit for school counseling PPS credential).

Permission to take courses at another institution, after admission to the College, may be granted at the discretion of the program director only if all of the following criteria are met:

- The course is vital to the student's program of study and is currently not available or not offered in a timely fashion at the College.
- The course is offered at the appropriate graduate level and is offered by a regionally accredited institution.
- The total number of transfer units does not exceed the maximum described above.
- Permission must be granted before the course is taken.
- Upon relocation outside of the area, a student may petition for an additional course to be taken at another institution.

Upon completion of the course, the other institution should forward the transcript information directly to the Registrar.

## **Transfer Units for Undergraduate Professional Students**

Credit obtained at other accredited colleges or universities may be accepted in fulfillment of elective and some general education requirements for a bachelor's degree. Transferred credit does not qualify as work done in residence.

Courses acceptable for transfer credit must:

- Have been taken at a regionally accredited institution of higher education or an appropriate and comparable institution in another country,
- Have been assigned a grade of "C-" (or its equivalent or better),
- Be transferable to the University of California if taken at a California community college, except for courses that are related to their current career field or (for LEAP students) the career field to which they are transitioning, which may be transferable to the California State University System,
- Not exceed 10 semester units for activity units (e.g., physical education),
- Not include remedial subjects and secondary school mathematics,
- May not exceed a total of 64 lower division semester units when combined with other courses comprising the bachelor's degree.

Permission to take courses at another institution, after admission to the College, may be granted at the discretion of the program director only if all of the following criteria are met:

- The course is offered by a regionally accredited institution.
- The course meets the criteria for acceptable transfer credit.
- The course is applicable to the student's program and does not exceed the maximum of 64 lower division units allowed toward the bachelor's degree.
- Permission is requested before the course is taken.

Upon completion of the course, the other institution should forward the transcript information directly to the Registrar.

## Grading

### GRADUATE STUDENTS

Graduate courses are evaluated on the 4.0 scale with "A" being equivalent to 4.0. Pass/fail (P/F) grading is offered in many graduate courses and programs. In most graduate programs, a passing grade (or the grade of "Pass" in a P/F courses) is equivalent to a "B-" or higher. In the Professional MBA Program, a passing grade is equivalent to a "C" or higher. Any failing grade must be repeated for credit toward the degree. In some programs, students may be required to complete a particular class with a passing grade before enrolling in subsequent course offerings. All grades will appear on the transcript, but for the purposes of calculating grade point average, only the grade received in the most recent (passing) enrollment will be used. The number of times a course may be repeated for credit with a passing grade is at the discretion of the individual program.

Graduate students who complete their degree with a cumulative grade point average of 3.75 or higher are designated as graduating with Honors by indication on both the transcript and the diploma. Students in P/F courses can also graduate with honors by receiving the grade of "honors" ("H") in five or more courses. Honors recognition in a course is given to students whose standard of performance significantly exceeds that expected in the course and is considered to be rare.

### UNDERGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Undergraduate professional courses are evaluated on the 4.0 scale with "A" being equivalent to 4.0. In courses taken P/F in undergraduate professional programs, the grade of "Pass" is equivalent to a C- or higher, and will not impact the student's GPA. Any grade beneath a C- (in letter-graded or P/F courses) needs to be repeated for credit toward the degree.

Undergraduate professional students are awarded honors designation using the traditional Latin honor system: *cum laude* (3.5 cumulative g.p.a.); *magna cum laude* (3.75 cumulative g.p.a.); and *summa cum laude* (3.85 g.p.a.).

### INCOMPLETES AND FINAL GRADES

An instructor may grant an incomplete ("I") to a student due to circumstances such as a serious illness, personal or family crisis, or extraordinary demands due to employment, or an unresolved Honor Code issue, given that the student is passing the course and has had reasonable attendance throughout the term. The instructor is responsible for determining whether an incomplete is the appropriate grade. Incomplete grades must be cleared by the end of the next term. An extension may be requested in writing prior to the deadline, using the form Student Petition for Exceptional Action. The petition must be approved by the instructor and the program director. Incomplete grades that are not cleared automatically become "F" grades, depending on the default grading status of the course. Students who have two incomplete grade reports for two consecutive semesters may not register for any new courses until the incompletes have been cleared.

Final grades are considered permanent and not to be changed except in the case of an error in computing, recording or evaluating a student's work, or in the case of an Honor Code sanction imposed after grades have been posted. When necessary, faculty may secure a Grade Change Petition from the Registrar's office. Students wishing to appeal a specific grade assigned should consult with their program director for program-specific appeal guidelines.

## Attendance policy

Regular attendance is an important obligation and essential condition for successful academic progress. Absences may seriously jeopardize the successful completion of a course. The instructor is responsible for communicating the attendance policy for a given course. Students are responsible for all assignments in a course whether or not the assignments were announced during an absence. Penalties for absences depend upon the nature and amount of work missed, of which the faculty member is the sole judge.

It is not permissible to miss regularly scheduled classes for the purpose of intercollegiate athletic practice. A student who misses the first session of a course, even if s/he is pre-registered, may have his/her place in that course given away and be denied further attendance in that course. The College recognizes that during a field experience placement or practicum, students may encounter labor disputes that result in a work stoppage (either a strike or a lock-out), a "sick-out," or a slow-down, or other job action. The policies and procedures of the College in such an event are available from the program director.

## Auditing

Students may audit College courses without earning College credit, depending on availability. A Petition to Audit a Course form must be filed by the student with the program director. Auditors cannot expect to take examinations or submit written work for evaluation, but may participate in class discussions.

## Open enrollment

Open enrollment is limited to students not regularly matriculated or admitted to a graduate program as well as those not maintaining continuous enrollment. Graduate students who register as open enrollment students in another program sever their continuous enrollment in their original program. No more than 3 units of open enrollment credit in a graduate program may be transferred upon entry into the graduate program.

## Continuous enrollment and leave of absence

All students are expected to be continuously enrolled in their program unless otherwise stipulated in program materials. Students who wish to leave the College temporarily must request such a leave in writing from their program director. Students may take leave for one academic term unless otherwise specified by the program. Normally, students who are not enrolled in classes for two academic terms will be considered withdrawn and must reapply to the program (and must pay an application fee). Programs are not required to accept such applications for readmission. If students are readmitted, they are held to the catalog requirements of the term in which they are readmitted. Students may file a petition with the program to extend their leave for more than one semester for medical reasons or for active military service. Students may also file to extend their leave on educational grounds. The rationale for this planned leave must document the intention to pursue other activities that clarify educational goals or enrich educational programs. These activities might include travel for educational purposes or on-the-job experience in an area related to the student's field of academic study.

The College does not permit leaves based on the lack of funds to pay tuition and other fees.

## Timely completion of degree

It is expected that students will make steady progress toward the completion of their degree. Therefore, students receiving the bachelor's, credential or master's degree have five years to complete their program; Students receiving the doctoral degree have eight years. Extensions may be granted by the dean of the school, but students may be held to new standards and/or asked to verify currency in any coursework taken more than five years prior.

## Dual degree programs

Saint Mary's allows for students to enroll in courses of study defined as dual degree programs. These programs, which involve students enrolling concurrently in two aligned courses of study, are defined by the College and available to potential applicants. In dual degree programs, students are admitted to the degree programs under the usual processes for the individual programs.

These students should ensure that they are seeking clear academic advice in scheduling coursework and fulfilling degree requirements in a timely manner.

## Second master's degree

Students wishing to take two or more courses of study concurrently that are not defined as dual degree programs are required to file a petition for exceptional action, providing a rationale for working on another degree program before completing the degree program in which they are currently enrolled. This petition must be approved by the dean of the school (or deans of the schools, should the programs be in different schools). Core courses for one program may not be used to satisfy core requirements of another program.

## Course evaluations

Course evaluations should be conducted for each graduate and undergraduate professional course offered at Saint Mary's College, and students have the responsibility to participate in these evaluations.

## Degree requirements

Students are expected to satisfy degree requirements defined by their individual programs. Please see program materials or program director for specific requirements.

## Advancement to candidacy and completion of degree

Each student who plans to become a candidate for a degree is required to:

- Be admitted to a specific program and maintain good academic standing
- Complete all required courses and reach the minimum unit requirement for the program
- File a Petition for Candidacy with the Registrar.

Students who have advanced to candidacy may be required to take additional exams or participate in final projects in order to complete the requirements for their degree. Some programs also require students to submit a thesis, synthesis project or dissertation. These students must follow the Thesis, Synthesis Project, and Dissertation Guidelines.

## Thesis, Synthesis Project, and Dissertation Guidelines

Some programs require students to submit a thesis, synthesis project or dissertation in order to complete their degrees. These students must follow the guidelines located at [library.stmarys-ca.edu/services/graduate/thesis-guidelines](http://library.stmarys-ca.edu/services/graduate/thesis-guidelines).



## Academic Appeal Process

The academic appeal process provides students with an opportunity to have their appeals heard in a predictable, timely and fair manner. Students are free to pursue any other right or remedy provided by law, but this policy sets forth the exclusive procedures to be followed by a student seeking an administrative resolution to an appeal.

### DEFINITION

An academic appeal is a dispute that involves the application of, or compliance with, the academic policies and procedures of Saint Mary's College. Appeals governed by this process generally include outcomes directly related to policies described in Part I of the *Graduate and Professional Student Handbook*. An appeal shall not include challenges to or attempts to change state or federal law, or policies or procedures of Saint Mary's College. Appeals may involve any of the following:

- The interpretation of admissions criteria regarding a particular student's application,
- Probation or disqualification,
- The determination of the number of units taken in residence at Saint Mary's College,
- The determination of transfer course or unit eligibility for degrees at Saint Mary's College,
- Grades,
- Determinations associated with the continuous enrollment/leave of absence policy,
- Determinations regarding the deadline for completion of degree,
- Determinations regarding the approval of a second master's degree,
- Determination of degree candidacy and conferral of degree,
- Or, any other situation related to academic policies (other than the Honor Code).

### GENERAL PROVISIONS

A student who elects to file an appeal shall follow the steps described below within the determined time frame.

At each step of the appeal procedure, a colleague or faculty member may accompany the student. Because the appeal process is not a legal process, the student shall not be accompanied or represented by an attorney.

Neither the student filing an appeal nor any faculty member or colleague accompanying the student will be disciplined or discriminated against for participating in the appeal procedure.

After a formal, written appeal has been filed, the issues of the appeal shall not be added to or altered except with the written permission of the dean of the school. If the process reveals that different or additional issues must be part of the appeal, then the changed appeal must be initiated anew.

### APPEAL PROCEDURES

A student who wants to appeal an academic issue should first discuss it with the involved faculty member (in the case of a grade) or the program director (on other matters) in order to try to work out a satisfactory solution in an informal manner. If a solution satisfactory to all parties is not accomplished through informal

discussion, then the appealing student may file a formal appeal.

If an informal resolution cannot be reached, the student must submit a written appeal to the dean of the school. If the involved faculty member is the dean of the school, the appeal should be submitted directly to the Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies, who will carry out the actions attributed to the dean. The written appeal should include a statement of the issue and the desired remedy.

No later than ten business days after receiving the appeal, the dean shall convene an Appeals Committee.

### APPEALS COMMITTEE AND FINAL DECISION

The Appeals Committee shall consist of two full-time faculty members (appointed by the dean), the associate dean, who shall act as chairperson of the committee, and a student appointed by the dean to serve on the Committee for a particular appeal. The dean also shall appoint two full-time faculty members as alternates to the Committee to be called upon in cases when a faculty member of the Committee is disqualified or is otherwise unavailable.

A student who is concerned that a faculty or student member of the Appeals Committee may be biased concerning that student's appeal may communicate this concern to the dean in writing. A committee member who feels a bias concerning a student's appeal may request that the dean appoint an alternate faculty or student member to serve. The dean shall determine if there is an actual or potential bias problem with a faculty or student member of the Committee and shall appoint an alternate when appropriate.

#### Appeal Committee members:

- Shall review the formal written appeal and all subsequent documentation generated through the Appeal Procedure,
- Shall provide all parties to an appeal the opportunity to be heard by the Committee,
- May conduct interviews and make inquiries in order to receive additional information to assist in its evaluation of the appeal,
- May interpret established policy as it applies to the specific circumstances of the appeal,
- May engage in additional fact-finding and suggest future policy changes to the administration of the College,
- Shall come to a consensus in its decision,
- Shall keep all proceedings of the Committee confidential to the extent possible while carrying out their assigned duty,
- Shall keep minutes and documents pertaining to the appeal in a confidential file separate from the student's regular file.

The Chair of the Appeals Committee shall notify the dean and student in writing of the Committee's decision. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.